

Second Decision Record for Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage EA #OR115-08-02

Background

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Butte Falls Resource Area is proposing to salvage trees blown down during January 2008 windstorms. The BLM completed the environmental analysis for salvage on 6,100 acres and published the *Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage Environmental Assessment* (EA) on July 25, 2008. The BLM consulted on the effects of this project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service as required under the Endangered Species Act. The BLM received Letters of Concurrence from both Services, dated July 10, 2008 and August 12, 2008, respectively. The letters concurred with the BLM's determination that the project is not likely to adversely affect any species listed as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The EA was subject to a 30-day public comment period that ended August 26, 2008.

On September 3, 2008, the BLM issued a *Finding of No Additional Significant Impact* and decided to implement a portion of the proposed action, as described in the first *Decision Record for Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage*, dated September 3, 2008. The first Decision Record represented approximately 57 percent (3,500 acres) of the 6,100 acres analyzed in the EA. In that decision, the BLM deferred implementation of a portion of the salvage project to allow the Butte Falls Field Manager more time to consider concerns received from the public.

Since the Field Manager signed the first decision on September 3, 2008, the Doubleday Fire burned through part of the blowdown salvage area. The fire began September 17, 2008 and was contained at 1,275 acres on September 21. The portion of the blowdown salvage area burned during the Doubleday Fire has been removed from the blowdown salvage project and will be analyzed in a separate fire salvage project.

Decision

My decision is to implement in part the actions proposed and analyzed under Alternative 3 in the EA.

My Decision is to

1. salvage trees blown down during the storm, storm-damaged trees not likely to survive (as defined in the EA), insect-killed trees, and trees hazardous to the public or workers on approximately 1,215 acres of BLM-administered matrix lands, 70 acres of riparian reserves, and 30 acres of late-successional reserve (known northern spotted owl activity center);
2. renovate 70 miles of road;
3. construct 1.0 miles of temporary spur roads; and
4. reduce the amount of slash and additional fuel hazard created by the windstorm on approximately 1,315 acres.

My decision will implement actions in locations described below and all required Project Design Features (PDFs), as described in the EA.

The actions implemented by this Decision occur on

Matrix lands in

Township 34 South, Range 2 East, sections 13, 23, 24, 26, 35;
Township 34 South, Range 3 East, sections 19, 31;
Township 35 South, Range 2 East, sections 1, 3, 13, 21, 23, 25; and
Township 35 South, Range 3 East, sections 7, 19, 31, Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Riparian Reserves in

T33S, R2E, Sections 15, 33;
T34S, R2E, Section 17;
T35S, R2E, Sections 1, 13, 23, 25, 27; and
T36S, R2E, Section 3, Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Northern Spotted Owl Activity Center in

T35S, R2E, Section 35, Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Decision Rationale

My decision to authorize the proposed action is in compliance with the current *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP), dated April 1995 and the *Northwest Forest Plan*, dated April 1994 (EA p. 5). The proposed action complies with all applicable standards and guidelines. This action takes into consideration cumulative impacts of past harvesting and silviculture practices on nearby private and Federal lands. All required Threatened and Endangered (T&E), Special Status Species (SSS), and cultural surveys were completed and mitigation was applied, where appropriate.

This action meets the purpose and need, identified in the EA, to salvage timber on BLM lands in the Butte Falls Resource Area affected by the windstorm in the Big Butte Creek, South Fork Rogue River, Rogue River/Lost Creek, and Little Butte Creek 5th field watersheds. Timber sales resulting from this decision will produce revenue for the Federal government and contribute approximately 8 million board feet of timber toward the Medford District's 2009 Allowable Sale Quantity of 57 million board feet. Renovation of 70 miles of road used to haul timber will reduce the potential for sediment production and reduce the sediment delivery to streams from these roads. Construction of up to 1.0 miles of temporary spur roads will allow vehicular access to salvage units that are not currently accessible by existing roads. Salvage and associated fuels treatment will reduce the existing fuel hazard created by the windstorm.

In preparing the EA, the BLM analyzed the impacts of the proposed action for the following issues: economics; potential insect epidemic; increased fuels; and recovery of severely damaged riparian reserves, known northern spotted owl activity center, and matrix land. The BLM determined the impacts will be within those analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement for

the Proposed Medford District Resource Management Plan (PRMP/EIS) or were otherwise insignificant. Discussion of those impacts can be found in the EA available at the Medford District Office, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon, or online at <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford>.

I did not select Alternative 1 (the No Action alternative) because it did not meet the identified purpose and need. Alternative 1 would not recover the revenue for the Federal government from approximately 35 million board feet of blown down timber currently existing on BLM matrix lands. No site preparation would occur to create planting sites for the establishment of conifer seedlings. Existing conditions would limit the areas open for planting and increase the cost of reestablishing a new forest stand (EA p. 73). This would reduce the number of trees that would be planted and slow the development and growth of a new forest stand for at least 10 to 20 years in some areas. Without a fully stocked conifer stand occupying the site, growth rates within these stands will be less than those planned for and expected on matrix lands under the sustained yield objectives of the PRMP/EIS (EA p.38). In addition, within mature stands near moderate and severe windthrown areas, the risk of mortality for live, standing Douglas-fir would be high for three to four years due to high populations of Douglas-fir bark beetles. Although immediate suppression and control of all wildfires, human or lightning-caused, would continue, the increased fuel load and the sequential increase in fire behavior would not be addressed (EA p. 62-66). The large, down logs would also impede the construction of hand or dozer line at a rate fast enough to contain the spread of a wildfire. This could result in fires larger than have occurred in the last 40 years.

Alternative 2 was considered but not selected because selection of Alternative 2 would preclude all recovery of severely damaged riparian reserves and the severely damaged known northern spotted owl activity center. Salvage would not occur in these areas and the potential for additional impacts from epidemic insect populations and increased fire risk to these already severely damaged habitats would not be reduced. The amount of debris covering the ground would not be decreased and would limit the areas available for planting and natural seeding. The costs for planting those areas would be increased and some areas would not be feasible for planting. The development of mature forest stands to provide stream shade and suitable habitat for spotted owls would be delayed in those areas.

I have chosen Alternative 3 because it most completely meets the identified purpose and need for the following reasons:

The Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage project is located on BLM-administered lands subject to the requirements of the O&C Lands Act which directs that O&C lands be managed for “permanent forest production . . . in accord with sustained-yield principles” (ROD/RMP p. 17). The Medford District ROD/RMP established certain land use allocations designed to address “the need for a sustainable supply of timber and other forest products that will help maintain the stability of the local and regional economies and contribute valuable resources to the national economy on a predictable and long-term basis” (ROD/RMP p. 16-17). The ROD/RMP (p. 38) allocated matrix lands for “produc[ing] a sustainable supply of timber.” Implementing this decision contributes an estimated 8 million board feet (MMBF) of timber from these matrix lands toward the Medford District Allowable Sale Quantity, thus meeting the timber resource objectives in the Medford

District RMP (ROD/RMP p. 17, 72-73) and one of the purposes identified for this project (EA p. 5).

Road renovation work associated with the salvage activities would decrease sediment delivery from existing roads and reduce the potential for road failure at stream crossings.

Salvage in riparian reserves, known northern spotted owl recovery centers, and on severely damaged matrix lands will accelerate forest stand recovery in those areas. Salvage in these areas will reduce the potential for additional impacts from epidemic insect populations and increased fire risk to these already severely damaged habitats. Salvage will hasten the recovery of these areas by reducing the depth of debris covering the ground, opening areas for planting and natural seeding, and accelerating the development of mature forest stands to provide stream shade and suitable habitat for spotted owls.

Another identified purpose for the project is to reduce the “potential breeding habitat for bark beetles, wood borers, and other insects” (EA p. 4 and 45). While it is not possible to precisely predict what insect populations will do, blowdown in previous large windstorms have consistently resulted in higher insect populations. Insect population levels outside of the range of natural variability may cause the mortality of healthy green trees. ROD/RMP direction (p. 189) is to limit the increase of endemic levels of insects. The intent of the salvage is not to eliminate insects in the Project Area, but to reduce “breeding habitat” and the potential build-up of large insect populations.

Salvage and fuels treatments provide an opportunity to reduce the amount of surface fuels and additional fuel hazard created by the windstorm. Reducing the fuels allows for a better chance to safely reduce the risk of large fires to the town of Butte Falls and other neighboring communities within the Wildland Urban Interface, Ginger Springs Municipal Watershed, road infrastructure, adjacent private lands, and critical resources (EA p. 58). The ROD/RMP direction (p. 89 and 91) is to lower the risk of high intensity, stand-replacing fires which can damage natural resources and homes and threaten the safety of individuals and fire fighters by reducing natural fuel hazards on BLM-administered lands in rural interface areas and reducing both natural and activity-based fuel hazards. The greatest potential for extreme fire behavior exists during the first 5 years after the blowdown.

Consultation and Coordination

Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) states that each Federal agency shall, in consultation with the Secretary, insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

The BLM consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), listed as “threatened” species under the ESA. Informal consultation was completed and the Service concurred with the BLM’s determination that the proposed action may affect, is not likely to adversely affect the northern spotted owl or designated northern spotted owl critical habitat. The BLM received a Letter of Concurrence from US Fish and Wildlife Service on July 10, 2008.

The BLM consulted with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), listed as a “threatened” species under the ESA. The BLM determined the only portion of the Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage project that may affect coho salmon is within the Big Butte Creek 5th field watershed. The BLM received a Letter of Concurrence from NMFS on August 12, 2008, concurring with the BLM’s determination of affects.

The Klamath Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz, and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde were notified of this project during the scoping process for the EA.

Jackson County Commissioners, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Oregon Department of Forestry were also notified during scoping and the EA public review period.

Public Involvement

The Butte Falls Resource Area mailed a scoping letter to a total of 90 individuals, businesses, organizations, tribes, and government agencies on May 28, 2008 to initiate scoping for the Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage project. Scoping recipients had either requested to be notified of such projects, were government entities, or owned land in the Project Area. The BLM held a public meeting on June 12, 2008 in the community of Butte Falls. The information sharing meeting was advertised in the *Medford Mail Tribune* and was attended by about 20 individuals. A total of 15 comment letters, public meeting comment forms, and e-mails were received from adjacent land owners, private citizens, timber companies, organizations, and environmental groups concerning the proposed salvage project.

The BLM conducted a field trip with Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center on May 7, 2008 to show the effects of the windstorm and discuss the BLM project proposal.

The BLM met with Southern Oregon Timber Industry Association (SOTIA) on May 13, 2008 and Jackson County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) on June 17, 2008 to apprise them of the Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage project.

On August 14, 2008 the BLM met with Jackson County Commissioners to discuss the Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage proposal on BLM-administered lands.

A formal public comment period for the project was held from July 27 to August 26, 2008. The public was notified through a newspaper notice in the *Medford Mail Tribune* and the *Upper Rogue Independent*. Letters and copies of the EA were sent to 29 individuals, organizations, and government entities. The BLM received seven letters containing comments on the EA.

Response to Public Comment

The first Decision Record for blowdown salvage, issued September 3, 2008, responded to the substantive comments the BLM received on the Butte Falls Blowdown Salvage EA. The comments received included concerns relating to the amount of tractor yarding acres and new road construction. The sum of these two decisions reduces the amount of harvest acres including

tractor yarding and the miles of new permanent road construction as proposed in the EA. The following table summarizes the actions proposed in the EA compared to actions implemented with each of these decisions.

Comparison between EA Proposals and Amounts Authorized in Decisions					
	Proposed EA	Decision #1	Decision #2	Actual	Difference between Proposed and Actual
Yarding System (acres)					
Tractor	4,870	3,098	1,099	4,197	-673
Skyline/Cable	970	168	123	291	-679
Helicopter	170	229	33	262	92
Bull Line	60	0	60	60	0
Total	6,010	3,495	1,315	4,810	-1,200
Roads (miles)					
New Permanent Roads	3.5	0.4	0	0.4	-3.1
New Temporary Roads	4.3	3.8	1.0	4.8	0.5*

*This number is greater than identified in the EA because 0.5 miles of permanent road was changed to temporary.

Administrative Remedies

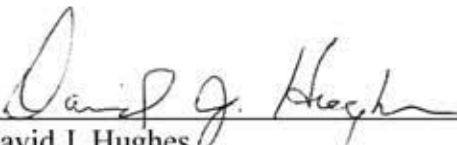
This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

Under BLM Forest Management Regulations 43 CFR § 5003.2, a decision is not effective until a notice of decision appears in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located. Multiple separate notices of decision will be published for this decision record, each constituting the decision document and establishing the effective date for separate portions of the Decision Record, as follows:

- A notice of sale will be posted for the Double Down Salvage Timber Sale under 43 CFR 5003.2(a) and (b).
- A notice of sale will be posted for the Look Out B Low Salvage Timber Sale under 43 CFR 5003.2(a) and (b).
- A notice of decision will be posted for the salvage activities in the known northern spotted owl activity center and riparian reserves under 43 CFR 5003.2(a) and (c).

For each of these notices of decision, the first publication of each respective notice in the *Medford Mail Tribune* shall constitute the publication date of the decision document for those respective portions of this Decision Record included in the notice of decision. These publication dates likewise establish the dates initiating the separate protest periods provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3 for each decision document. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the *Medford Mail Tribune* will prevail as the effective date for each notice of decision.

Under 43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (a), protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the publication date of the notice of decision. Under 43 CFR 5003.3 (b), protest filed with the authorized officer shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. As interpreted by BLM, the regulations do not authorize acceptance by the BLM of protests in any form other than a signed, paper document that is delivered to the physical address of the BLM office within the 15-day period. Therefore, e-mail, verbal, or facsimile protests will not be accepted. A decision on a protest would be subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, although, under 43 CFR 5003.1 subsection (a), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of a decision governing or relating to forest management under 43 CFR 5003.2 or 5003.3.



David J. Hughes
Acting Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area

11/12/08

Date